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ABSTRACT

An intervention with six elementary-aged students with behavioral disorders was designed to increase positive attitudes toward school and learning, to improve self-esteem and empowerment, and to decrease inappropriate behaviors. The Foxfire pedagogy was used to achieve academic goals and to empower students. Students identified characteristics of a good teacher, identified characteristics of memorable learning experiences, were assessed on academic skills and attitudes, established a real-world connection between academic goals and the need to accomplish them, designed projects incorporating their objectives, developed a plan to complete the project, identified a method of evaluation for their project, and reflected on problems with their project and ways to improve it. At the conclusion of the intervention, four out of six students indicated that they liked school, and all of the students passed their academic subjects. Inappropriate behaviors decreased, although regular education teachers did not notice any changes in students' attitudes. There was no measurable evidence of increased self-esteem using the Piers-Harris measure. Students' writing skills improved as measured by the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised. Students also appeared to be more enthusiastic about writing, publishing their work, and reading than before the intervention. Appendices provide the teacher questionnaire and a student attitude evaluation instrument. (Contains 17 references.) (SW)

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ED 385 976

Creating a Positive Academic Environment For Students with Behavioral Disorders Using the Foxfire Pedagogy

by

Marcia Gromme-Clark

Cluster 62

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Marcia Gromme-Clark under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

May 10, 1995 — Dr Mary Staggs
Date — Dr. Mary Staggs, Adviser

NOVA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Creating A Positive Academic Environment for Students with Behavioral Disorders Using the Foxfire Pedagogy. Gromme-Clark, 1995: Practicum I Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Positive Academic Environment/Positive Attitude/Negative Attitude/Behavioral Disorders/Foxfire/Empowerment.

This practicum aimed to increase positive attitudes toward school and learning in elementary-aged students with behavioral disorders. It also attempted to increase self-esteem and empowerment of students and decrease inappropriate behaviors.

Students were empowered by implementing the Foxfire pedagogy to achieve academic goals. Students identified real-world connections for those goals and designed their own projects in order to attain those goals. They identified the method of evaluation and reflected on problems with their project and ways to improve it.

Outcomes of the practicum were encouraging. Five of the six objectives were achieved. Four out of six students indicated that they liked school and all the students passed all their academic subjects. Results indicated that inappropriate behaviors decreased (office visits, visits to time out, isolation, and negative comments) although regular education teachers did not notice any change in students' attitudes. There was no measurable evidence of increased self-esteem. Students' writing skills improved as measured by the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised and students appeared to be more enthusiastic about writing, publishing their work, and reading than they were before the practicum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The community is a suburb of a rapidly expanding southern metropolis. In recent years the county was one of the fastest growing ones in the country, but presently it is in the top 15 in terms of population growth. The population of the community is approximately 4500 and it is composed predominately of blue-collared workers. The unemployment rate is 5.7% and the average income is $18,825.00 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis). A small percentage of the school's population is of African-American descent although the school was built for African-Americans during the days of segregation. None of the writer's students are African-Americans. Out of 512 students there are 96 on the free lunch program and 23 on the reduced lunch program. The community is growing rapidly with little planning and consideration being taken to accommodate that growth.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is a teacher of students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBD) in an elementary school. The elementary school serves students from the fourth and fifth grades. The goal of the EBD program is to enable students to acquire the necessary skills to function adequately in social and academic environments and the writer's role is to assist students in acquiring those necessary skills.

The school has a population of 512 which is about 25% above the number of students for whom the building was built. The county is experiencing rapid growth with an average of one new school being built each year and that school containing students beyond its capacity in the first year. The writer's school presently houses 10 fourth grade classes and 8 fifth grade classes. The writer operates her program in a standard sized carpeted trailer. There are seven trailers located at the school which was built in the 1940s. There are special education classes for students with learning disabilities, mild intellectual impairment, behavior disorders, and problems with speech and/or language.

The writer's work setting is a categorical resource program which is built around the concept of homogenous grouping so that students with the same disability (emotional/ behavioral disorders or EBD) attend class together. The resource program was created to address the needs of students with mild disabilities. These students are enrolled in the regular education classroom and

attend the resource program for special instruction for a period of time less than fifty percent of the school day. The writer uses a pull-out model which means students are taken out of the regular education program for special instruction. The amount of instructional time is determined by the needs of the individual students as specified in their Individualized Educational Program (IEP). Eight students are presently being served with an average of 2.25 hours per day in the BDR room. The writer and the regular education teachers cooperate in planning students' total instructional program. The work setting includes motivated teachers, support staff, and administration.

To qualify for the Behavioral Disorders Resource (BDR) program students must exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: 1) an inability to maintain or build satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers; 2) an inability to learn which cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory, neurophysiological, or general health factors; 3) consistent or chronic inappropriate type of behavior of feelings under normal conditions; 4) displayed pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; 5) displayed tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or unreasonable fears associated with personal or school problems. The student with an EBD must exhibit one or more of those characteristics intensely and chronically, regardless of the situation and the student's difficulty cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory or general factors (Behavioral Disorders Manual, 1994).

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Students in the BDR room were typically negative and/or apathetic about their education, their grades and learning in general. They demonstrated negative attitudes and negative behaviors, and they frequently verbalized negative feelings and attitudes regarding school. Typical comments included, "Work is stupid, why do I have to do this, I hate math or reading or science, An F don't matter to me, etc." Students wasted time frequently and would sit at their desk and twiddle their thumbs or interfere with other students' learning rather than read a book or do their work. Their grades in the regular education classroom were lower because they did not bother to turn their classwork or homework in, or if they did turn it in they raced through it in order to get it done. The persons who were affected by these negative attitudes and behaviors included the students and their parents, the regular education teachers and the special education teachers, as well as society in general. The reason that this type of problem existed and still may exist to a

certain extent, is that there are many underlying factors and there is no easy solution. Unfortunately, it appears that this problem is not unique to the BDR classroom. Evidence of this problem is that one of every four students who begins elementary school in the U.S.A. does not graduate from high school (Raffini, 1988).

Briefly stated, the problem was that students in the BDR room had negative attitudes and feelings about school and the things they did in school.

Problem Documentation

Students were achieving below grade level in the subjects of Reading and Written Expression. On the average students in the writer's room were one and a half grade levels below their grade level in these academic subjects with a range of three grade levels below to one and a half above.

Interviews with the regular education teachers of students in the writer's room indicated that: 1) 5 out of 8 students were not achieving commiserate with their ability; 2) 5 out of 8 students were not completing their classwork or their homework; and 3) 5 out of 8 students complained about the amount and type of work they were given in their regular education classes. The special education teacher indicated that: 1) 7 out of 8 students did not turn in their homework; 2) 5 out of 8 students were not achieving academically commiserate with their ability; and 3) 6 out of 8 students complained about the amount and type of work they were given in the BDR room.

Interview data with teachers indicated that there were 25 office referrals

during a 10 week period for the 8 students in the BDR room. Reasons for being referred included fighting, disrupting class, using obscenities, and not following directions. The school has a good discipline plan which includes many levels before a student is sent to the office so those students who do go have typically been misbehaving. There were 17 incidents where students were placed in time out (in other teachers' rooms) with their work for periods of time ranging from 1 to 2 hours. Students were also placed in isolation six times. Isolation consists of the student remaining in the classroom without being allowed to talk or speak with the teacher or fellow students.

The writer kept a tally count of students' negative comments over a 1 week period in which students were not reprimanded when they made negative statements. During this period 37 statements were made. Typical statements include: "This is stupid, I hate work, Why do I have to do this?, Oh no, etc."

Causative Analysis

As mentioned previously there are numerous causes of negative attitudes. Students may encounter negativity at home and at school. Most of their parents did not complete high school and place education as a low priority. Students with learning disabilities and/or behavioral disabilities report lower self esteem and lower communication satisfaction scores with their parents than do normal students (Omizo, Amerikaner, & Michael, 1985). The writer has a student whose mother consistently brings him in late if he comes at all so that the child feels that school and what takes place there is unimportant. Since these students do have

emotional problems there are underlying emotional or psychological factors that may be interfering with their behavior and academics and which could be contributing to their negative attitudes and/or apathy. Most students in the BD room are not experiencing success in the academic environment and so they are not enjoying it. They are vocal about what they like and do not like and unfortunately they do not have the social skills to express those dislikes in a socially appropriate manner. Frequently school is boring especially when one compares it to television, video games, and the myriad of entertainment that is available in the present day. And finally and perhaps most importantly children are given little choice, input, or control in their academic environment.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Nationally about one of every four students who enter first grade in the U.S.A. drops out before graduating from high school (Raffini, 1988). This percentage is even higher for students who are in Special Education. This negative and/or apathetic attitude is even apparent in elementary schools. Based on discussions with other teachers, it appears that somewhere in the second through fourth grade students begin to lose that desire or hunger to learn. Raffini believes that the slower students are the victims of a system that rewards the quick and punishes the slow students because the system forces competition among students of unequal ability. Slower students find themselves spending more and more time and effort to learn what others learn in a fraction of the time. In the earlier grades, these students will persist because they have been taught that more effort will

result in success, but as they grow older they learn that although their effort does lead to higher achievement they will still receive lower grades because their performance is still below average. Some of these students accept their below-average achievement and continue to put forth their effort. Others find outlets in extracurricular activities and others begin to act out. Some students who equate their achievement with their self-worth find it too painful to accept their averageness and decide that if they cannot win they will at least avoid losing, so they quit trying. This appears to be where most of the writer's students are heading. In fact, some have already reached this point and will refuse to do work in the regular classroom and it is only with great difficulty and persistence on the part of the writer that they complete their work successfully in the BDR room. The students in the writer's class are one or more grade levels below their grade placement in most academic subjects.

Goslin (1989) attributes the continuing educational failure of American youth to underachievement or not working to one's potential. He believes that the American educational system is failing its students by not motivating them properly and by allowing them to underachieve. Koyanagi & Gaines (1993) also propose that the schools today are failing to meet students' needs. Other researchers attribute the negative attitudes and apathy of many of today's students to learned helplessness (Williams & Barber, 1992) and external locus of control (Enger & others, 1993).

Paulo Freire, the head of Brazil's literacy campaign was trained in a

traditional doctoral program in reading, but he found that his expertise had little value in the face of pervasive peasant apathy. He attributed the negative attitude toward education among the lower classes in Brazil to a feeling of powerlessness and lack of control by the students and their families (Timpson, 1988). His literacy campaign was effective in Brazil and his ideas have been adopted in areas of Latin America and Africa as well as South America.

Ensminger & Dangel (1992) describe students with mild disabilities as being bored with education because they find little relevance in their instruction and they want more opportunities to communicate and share with their peers. The present mode of instruction focuses on students' disabilities rather than abilities and appears to promote students who are not motivated to achieve academically. The writers describe the Foxfire approach as one method of motivating students and making their education relevant and important to them. The Foxfire pedagogy is an experiential approach designed to empower students and teachers in the learning process which has evolved into a set of 10 core practices and procedures being used by students of all ages.

In 1967 Eliot Wigginton was teaching high school English in a conservative, traditional organized public school in Appalachian Georgia. He experienced some of the same attitudes and comments that the writer and numerous other teachers are experiencing, "Why do we have to do this, this is stupid, boring, useless, etc." Wigginton designed and incorporated an approach to teaching that led to national recognition, financial success, publication of his

students' work and his own book, and establishment of courses designed to teach his method to other teachers. Due to his efforts the idea became widely accepted that students of any age or grade level could benefit from examining the culture, traditions, and history of their communities, urban or rural and document and publish their findings (Wigginton, 1989).

Wigginton has identified 10 core practices that are essential to correct implementation of his educational approach. These practices are used in order to make learning meaningful, effective and empowering for students. Teachers present the learning objective and students decide how they wish to accomplish that objective. 1) All the work teachers and students do together must flow from student desire. 2) Clear connections between the students' work, the surrounding community, and the real-world outside the classroom are established. 3) Students are active in the production of their work rather than passively receiving processed information. 4) The educational process emphasizes peer teaching, small-group work, and teamwork. 5) Rather than being the boss and/or the repository of knowledge the teacher is a collaborator, team leader, and team guide. Each and every student participates in the projects and creates their own individual stamp on their work. 6) There is an audience for the final project. 7) The academic integrity of the work must be absolutely clear. 8) The work must include honest, ongoing evaluation for content and skills and changes in the attitudes of students. 9) New activities should grow out of the old activity. 10) The final and perhaps most important principle is that as students become more thoughtful participants in

their own education, the goal of teachers should be to help them become increasingly able and willing to guide their own learning, fearlessly and independently for the rest of their lives.

Ensminger & Dangel (1992) identified eight steps in implementing the Foxfire approach for students in special education classes. 1) Students identify the characteristics of a good teacher. 2) Students identify memorable learning experiences and their characteristics. 3) The teacher reviews the academic agenda and pretests students on content, skills, and attitudes. 4) The teacher and students establish the real-world connection of the academic agenda. 5) The students select a project that incorporates the objective and a real-world connection to that objective. 6) The students develop a plan for the project. 7) Students refer back to the agenda to identify how the objective incorporates into the project and identify a method of evaluation. 8) The teacher provides opportunities for students to reflect and extend what they have learned and what they can do to improve the process the next time. The Foxfire approach takes into account that student motivation is a key ingredient in the learning process and it is one way of making learning more meaningful for students and teachers. It emphasizes the importance of connecting learning to student knowledge and experience; fosters social development through group decision making; and increases student responsibility for their own learning (Ensminger & Dangel, 1992).

Williams & Barber (1992) attribute the dearth of success of students in special education to a more external locus of control and learned helplessness. An

external locus of control indicates that one believes events and other people control one's life, situation, etc. and learned helplessness is a phenomena in which people believe that no matter what they do they are unable to change outcomes in their lives. Gama (1991) found that by the fifth grade students who were unsuccessful in school had more negative attitudes toward school, lower self-concepts, and emitted mostly internal, stable and uncontrollable failure attributions while successful students made mostly internal, stable and controllable attributions to success. Moore (1992) attributes the American tendency to stress competition and winning to negative attitudes among students.

To summarize, researchers are concerned about the status of educational systems not only in the U.S.A. but in other countries as well and they are advocating a change from the present system. Freire proposes empowerment of students and emphasis on student control. Students need to be active in the learning process if their thinking is to reach its fullest potential. Goslin (1989) states that the American educational system must return to a more humanistic approach with emphasis on individuality, physical outlets, self-governance, exploratory education, school-based management and increased parental involvement across all ages. Ensminger & Dangel report that especially for the field of special education there is a need for change in the American educational system. They recognize that student motivation is a key ingredient in the learning process and the key to increasing motivation is to empower students in their educational program. These researchers all agree that there is a very definite need

to change and that that change must include empowerment and involvement on the part of the students.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The projected goal of the practicum was that students in the BDR program would demonstrate positive attitudes and appropriate behaviors in school. It was projected that students would verbalize positive comments about school and what they were doing there and that their grades and skills would improve.

Projected Outcomes

The following six goals and outcomes were projected for the practicum. The writer began the practicum with eight students, however two of the students transferred to other schools so pre and post-implementation data were available on only six students.

1) The first is that 4 out of 6 students will demonstrate positive attitudes toward school. These positive attitudes will be demonstrated by an average increase of one point on the Primary Evaluation Instrument (See Appendix A). Another possible measure of students' attitudes toward school is to have students write a paragraph about how they feel about school before and after the implementation of

the practicum.

2) The second expected outcome is that 4 out of 6 students will receive passing grades on at least three out of four academic subjects. Students receive numerical grades for the following subjects: Reading, Language, Spelling, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, and Health. Since students spend variable amounts of time in the BDR classroom for a variety of subjects, the academic grades from all subjects will be included.

3) The third expected outcome is that at least 4 out of 6 students will demonstrate a decrease in inappropriate behaviors as measured by: a) an elimination of office referrals; b) a reduction to one time a week or less of visits to time out in other teachers' classrooms; and c) a reduction in the number of points lost per day. Students lose one point in the BDR room for each time they break one of the following rules: follow directions the first time; raise hand to speak; keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself; stay in your seat unless you have permission to get up; and have a good attitude.

4) The fourth outcome is that students will decrease their disruptive behavior and improve their academic performance based on the results of a questionnaire administered to their regular education teachers.

5) The fifth outcome is that students will decrease their negative statements from an average of 5 per day (as a class) to 1 per day in the BDR room.

6) The sixth outcome is that students' self-esteem will increase by 5 points (using T scores) on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.

Measurement of Outcomes

Students' attitudes toward school were measured by the Primary Evaluation Instrument (See Appendix A), their journal entries, students' comments about school and what they were learning, and the writer's journal. Negative comments were recorded on a behavior checklist. Grades were measured by averaging students' grades on academic subjects. Inappropriate behaviors were assessed by counting office referrals, visits to time out, and isolation as well as recording inappropriate behaviors on a behavior checklist. Information about inappropriate behaviors was also obtained via questionnaire data obtained from the regular education teachers.

Self-esteem was assessed by having the students complete the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The Piers-Harris is an 80 item, self-report questionnaire designed to assist in the assessment of self-concept in children and adolescents. The Written Subtest-Level II of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R) was chosen to assess how well students write because it is a well-developed and standardized test with good reliability and validity. Level II requires students to write a story using one out of two picture prompts. The writer used the Written Language composite score which is obtained by combining the scores on the Spelling and Written Expression subtests.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem was that students with Behavioral Disorders demonstrated negative attitudes and negative behaviors at school and they frequently verbalized negative feelings regarding school. Instructional time was wasted dealing with negative thoughts, statements, and behaviors not to mention the effect such negativism had on the students' self-concepts. Research suggests several "remedies" for increasing positive attitudes and performance by students who are experiencing difficulty in the academic setting. These include: individual goal-setting, outcome-based instruction and evaluation; attribution retraining (view failure as a lack of effect rather than a lack of ability and attributing success to internal factors and failure to external factors); and cooperative learning (Raffini, 1988).

Goslin advocates returning to a student-centered educational system and a humanistic approach to education and he includes nine points that would benefit the American system. The first is individual education where teachers would meet

individually with underachieving students for at least 10 minutes a day. The second is team teaching which would offer a support system for both students and teachers and the third is independent study. Goslin advocates a physical fitness program of one hour a day that consists of cardiovascular workouts, body strengthening, and competitive games. The fifth point is instruction in self-governance and the sixth is exploratory education to assist children in breaking out of their stereotypes and forming positive self-images. The seventh is parent involvement which he asserts is the key to a successful school system. The eighth is school-based management and the ninth is business partnerships in education.

Freire's practices to increase positive attitudes and involvement in education include: building upon indigenous language usage, employing materials relevant to students' desires to improve their lives, empowerment, and using education to inspire hope and action. Central to his writings is the concept of empowerment and the learner's need to be active in her or his own education. Teachers must change from directing to facilitating, from talking to listening, and from doing to observing. Freire believes that students must be active in the learning process if their thinking is to develop to its fullest potential and that students' language should be the basis for developing reading and writing skills. Advanced students are enlisted as cooperative group leaders, supports and resources. Timpson (1988) suggests that Freire's theory could help to solve many of the problems of the American educational system.

Freire's theory is similar to Wigginton's and both have demonstrated

considerable success in increasing: student involvement; students' achievement; and positive attitudes. Many of Goslin's points are already in practice at the writer's location and they do not appear to be effective in eliminating the negative behaviors and attitudes present. The students meet individually with their special education teacher at least 15 minutes a day and team teaching is used at the writer's site. Unfortunately, the physical fitness program is only 30 minutes a day but it is fairly rigorous (students return sweating profusely and begging the writer to turn the air on even in October). School-based management and business partnerships in education are in effect at the school as well as a fairly strong Parental Teacher Organization (PTO). Approximately 30% of the students' parents attend these meetings but they are not actively involved in them. Exploratory classes begin in the sixth grade in the writer's educational system so this option is not presently being explored. Other researchers indicate a need to change from emphasizing competition to emphasizing cooperation (Moore, 1992) or changing from an external locus of control to internal. The writer emphasizes cooperation rather than competition and she feels that the process of allowing students control in their educational environment will help to establish a more internal locus of control.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

The writer believes that much of the students' negativism stems from their home environment and/or their lack of success in school. Since most of the

students are already below grade level and they do not particularly enjoy learning or school activities, the writer agreed with Freire, Ensminger, Dangel, and Wigginton that the key to involving these students is to allow them some control over how and what they learn. In other words, the writer felt that implementing the Foxfire pedagogy would help increase students' interest and involvement in their education and eliminate many of the negative behaviors observed in the BDR room and hopefully in the regular education classroom as well.

Report of Action Taken

Students were administered: the written subtest portion of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R); the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale; and the Primary Evaluation Instrument prior to and after the implementation period. Teachers completed their questionnaire prior to and after the implementation period. The students completed the eight steps to implement the Foxfire pedagogy as identified by Ensminger & Dangel. The first task was to identify the characteristics of a good teacher. As identified by the class, a good teacher: helps you; takes you outside; lets you play; rewards you for good behavior; has lots of art projects; trusts you; swings and plays with you; takes students on lots of field trips; is patient; does not yell a lot; and lets you get out of work sometimes. Not surprisingly, most of these characteristics center around playing and it is important to realize that for many children (and especially the writer's students) playing is work.

The second task involved identifying the characteristics of students'

memorable learning experiences. Memorable learning experiences for the writer's fourth and fifth graders included: learning how to tie their shoes; learning how to write and read; and learning their ABCs. One student identified a particular experience where he had witnessed a student using drugs and he had told the proper authorities. The central characteristics identified in these learning experiences were: creating a feeling of happiness and self-sufficiency; resolution of conflict; increasing self-esteem; learning new skills; and personal growth.

The third step was to have the teacher identify the academic agenda and pretest the students on content, skills and attitudes. The academic goals were appreciation of different forms of literature and participation in the writing process. Students were administered the written Subtest section of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R). Age standard scores ranged from 60 to 87 with an average of 73. Students were also administered the Primary Evaluation Instrument to determine their attitude towards school, peers, and the activities they did in school. The average rank assigned to school, peers, and school activities was a 2 which indicates that students are moderately pleased about what is happening in school even though their comments about school and their behaviors suggested the opposite.

The fourth step was to establish a real-world connection between the academic goals and the need to accomplish them. Students realized that one needs to know how to write coherently for many reasons: to communicate with friends, family and business acquaintances. Since one wants to communicate in the best

manner possible it is necessary to revise and edit and correct written communications. Students also realized that appreciating different forms of literature would help them learn more and offer new types of leisure activities as well as exposure to different lifestyles and cultures.

The fifth step was to select a project and incorporate the objective and real-world connection to that objective. Students identified reading different types of literature as the primary method of learning to appreciate different forms. They also decided that having free reading for 20 minutes a day would help them accomplish that goal. Students were especially enthusiastic about Greek mythology because a TV special on Hercules began during the implementation period. They requested the writer to read about the Twelve Labors of Hercules and they were very enthusiastic about the stories. Students were accustomed to writing in their journal and they agreed that it was a good way to practice the writing process. They wrote at least four sentences a day about anything they wanted although topics were contributed by students and the writer for those students who did not have something they wanted to write about. Most of the students decided that they wanted their project to be teaching the class a lesson. One of the students decided he would rather illustrate and write a comic book and several of the students wanted to work collaboratively and produce a play or teach the class an art lesson. Students agreed that writing a page (or more) about their topics, plays, or stories, etc. would demonstrate their participation in the writing process. During the proofreading, editing, and revising stages the writer provided

lessons as required (the use of quotation marks, agreement of subject and verb, etc.).

The sixth step was to design a plan. The writer's pupils really enjoyed writing discipline plans and their "lesson plans" for their lessons. They were very enthusiastic about detailing what they would do with students who were not paying attention or following the rules. Their plans varied from reading their written product to lecturing students and administering tests to their pupils. Attention spans were short so most students' projects and plans lasted from a week to 2 weeks. Some students experienced difficulty in understanding that they needed to produce written products since their objective was to participate in the writing process. One student in particular expressed a great deal of reluctance when asked to write and the writer had to use several behavior modification techniques to assist him in his ordeal. Midway through the practicum students received letters from"pen pals" at a neighboring middle school. They all agreed that writing letters was another way to participate in the writing process. The students were excited about communicating with middle school students and finding out what middle school was like.

The seventh step involved referring back to the original agenda to identify how the objective incorporates into the project or plan and identifying a method of evaluation. Some students wanted to get up in front of the class and clown around without preparing a lesson or participating at all in any type of writing process. The writer had to intervene and share with the students the original goals and ask

them how they wanted to demonstrate the attainment of those goals. Other students were very conscientious about their goals and working to attain those goals. Most students chose their final product as the instrument that should be evaluated and they typically wanted the writer to be the one doing the evaluating (their initial experiences with student evaluators were not pleasant and student evaluations tended to be more strict than those completed by teachers).

The eighth step involved providing the opportunity for students to reflect on their products and identify methods of improving those products and projects. Students accomplished their reflections through a verbal or a written medium depending on which medium they were more comfortable.

The projects and published works tended to be of short duration. It took some students a week to prepare for presentation and others 2 weeks. All of the students did very well when they were teaching the class, one in particular did an excellent job! This student was the one who had the most difficulty in expressing himself on paper. Two of the students tried to read their written product in lieu of teaching the class, but they improvised when they noticed how inattentive their classmates were.

About 8 weeks into the practicum, the writer noticed that it was difficult to give up control to the students and that there was also a lot more talking and socialization than she had been used to which is not necessarily a "bad" thing. She also noticed that her students tended to want to play a lot and do the minimum amount of work necessary (if any). The Foxfire pedagogy was difficult to use with

students in BD because they do tend to have deficits in social skills but it is necessary for these students to learn and practice those skills in order to function more effectively in the academic environment and other environments as well. When some of the students made the decision to work in groups, they attempted to bail on each other and leave their partner midway through the project, so the writer had to intervene. Two of the students taught the class on volcanoes and performed a hands-on demonstration which was a smashing success.

During the 15 week practicum experience there were many interruptions. The students were required to take the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) for a week, the classroom was relocated from a trailer to the stage due to renovations, there were required writing tests, etc. Due to these interruptions the implementation period lasted 15 weeks. The students tended to complain about these interruptions and disliked the change in routine. They communicated with their pen pals for a total of 3 times during the implementation period. Eleven weeks into the period the students typed their products on the computer using Children's Publishing Center and they were all very enthusiastic about their work and publishing it. Based upon the students' enthusiastic reactions, accessible computers would provide additional encouragement for writing and publishing their work. Students published their work by presenting to the class and/or hanging their products in the main hallway of the school. During the implementation period the writer noticed that the children began to make real progress in their writing. For second and third projects students chose writing

stories and their stories showed improvement with experience. Instead of describing a series of events or illustrations, they began to create plots with interesting story lines. This progress was reflected both in the difference in PIAT-R scores and in the interest students displayed in writing and publishing their work, as well as in their journals. During the final week of the implementation period two of the students choose to remain at school instead of going on a field trip with their class and one student requested that the writer come in during the spring break because he liked school so much he wanted to come even when he should have been on vacation.

Students' participation in the writing process became more involved as the practicum progressed. In the beginning students thought they could just scribble something down on paper and hand it in. The writer emphasized that students need to reread everything they write (even graffiti on the walls) to make sure that what they wrote is what they meant and they began to understand that writing is a process. However, students still need to work on this area. In the future, it would perhaps benefit students to have another student or study buddy proofread and edit their papers and it would help them if they did it for their fellow students. Several lessons were given on the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) but students have not mastered the concept entirely and they would benefit from additional instruction in writing skills.

Students appeared to make progress in appreciating different types of literature. The types of literature they read and enjoyed included many diverse

types such as ghost stories, fiction, nonfiction books with topics such as the Civil War, the Vietnam War, science (Magic School Bus books), and Greek mythology. These different areas were all explored in a time period of 15 weeks. Students all enjoyed their exposure to different types of literature and were enthusiastic about their 20 minutes of daily silent reading.

Midway through the practicum experience the writer offered to videotape the students' presentations. She was amazed at how excited the male students were. In contrast, the two female students did not want to be videotaped at all. However, they did excellent jobs on their presentations and were skilled at involving their classmates in the learning procedure.

It was hoped that the writer would take more of the role of a facilitator rather than a teacher/dictator in this practicum since the goal was to allow students control and responsibility for their educational environment in the hopes of improving their attitude and participation in that environment. However, the writer feels that students in the BD classroom probably need a little more guidance and structure than students might in the regular education classroom. For example, two of the students decided to perform a crime mystery play and halfway through the project's completion one of the students tried to back out and not participate in the writing or production of the play. The writer had to intervene and establish that this was not an option. Other students wanted to quit in the middle of projects because they were having difficulty getting along with their partner or partners or their topic involved too much work or no longer interested

them. Even so, the students enjoyed having some control over the environment and the writer feels that they made more progress academically than they would have otherwise.

Chapter V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The students in the BDR room have had negative attitudes and feelings about school and most of the academic tasks they were asked to complete. The solution to this problem was to empower students by implementing the Foxfire pedagogy in the classroom. The implementation period began with 8 students but midway through the implementation 2 of the students transferred to other schools so pre and post-implementation data is available on only 6 students. The goal statements were changed to "4 out of 6" to accommodate the change in student number.

Results

1. Four out of 6 students will demonstrate positive attitudes toward school based on results from the Primary Evaluation Instrument (PEI). The results from the PEI indicated, that as a group, attitudes toward classroom instruction, teachers, and peers did not improve, in fact they got worse by 0.5 on a 5 point Likhart scale. However, both pre and post implementation results indicated that students had

somewhat positive attitudes toward classroom instruction and their teachers and peers. The classroom average on each response fell from a 2 or "moderately happy" to a 2.5, in-between "moderately happy" and "neither happy or unhappy." Individually, one female student's attitudes/feelings remained the same while the other female's attitude improved by 0.5. The 2 fifth grade boys indicated that they felt worse about their peers, teachers and instruction by 0.5 and 0.8. One of the fourth grade boys attitudes improved by 1 point and the other indicated that he felt worse about his academic environment by 0.5. Students also wrote about their attitudes toward school in their journals and journal entries indicated that 3 students liked school, 1 student sort of liked it, and 2 did not like school. The results from journal entries suggest that 4 out of 6 students have positive attitudes towards school.

2. Four out of 6 students will receive passing grades on three out of four academic subjects. All 6 students received passing grades on three out of four subjects. The average across all subjects for all students rose from a 78 on the pre-implementation data to an 82 during and immediately after the implementation period.

3. Four out of 6 students will demonstrate decreases in inappropriate behaviors as manifested by an elimination of office referrals; a reduction to one time a week (or less) of visits to time out in other teachers' classrooms; and a reduction in the number of points lost per day (20). Office referrals decreased from 25 (pre-implementation) to 2 but they were not eliminated entirely. Referrals to time out

decreased from 17 to 0 and incidences of isolation decreased from 6 to 2. Points lost per day decreased from 20 to 9 (the class as a whole) so this objective was met.

4. Students will decrease their disruptive behaviors and increase their academic performance as assessed by their regular education teachers in surveys. Results from the teacher questionnaires did not indicate many changes in students' behaviors as measured before the implementation of the practicum and after. Four out of 6 students "like school" and were "interested in learning" as long as they were doing something they liked that did not require much effort both before and after the implementation period. There were no changes in numbers of positive or negative statements as measured by the regular education teachers, however office referrals decreased. Grades improved a little and the incidences of defiance, irresponsibility, temper outbursts, fighting and obscene language remained the same. Students' participation in class and their completion of classroom assignments remained the same. Results from the teacher questionnaires did not suggest that the implementation plan was successful in improving students' attitudes toward school as measured by their regular education teachers although their discipline referrals decreased quite a bit.

5. Students will decrease their negative statements from an average of 5 per day to 1 per day. Based on the results of a point system, students were successful in reducing their negative statements from an average of 5 to 1 or less per day. It was interesting to note that most of the students began to make positive remarks

and comments about school. They appeared interested and excited about making their own choices on subject matter and method of presentation.

6. Students' self-esteem will increase based on their T scores on the Piers-Harris self-esteem measure. Results of the Piers-Harris self-esteem measure did not indicate a significant change in students' scores. The males all scored below the 50th percentile while one of the two female students scored at the 90th percentile and the other scored at the 65th percentile both pre-implementation and post. Two of the males' scores indicated that they were at the 22nd percentile while another male's score placed him at the 37th percentile and the highest percentile for males was the 43rd percentile. There was little to no change in the students' T scores. The Piers-Harris yields T scores and percentile scores but no standard scores. Results from the Piers-Harris indicated that most male students in the BDR room have lower self-esteem than the normalization group while the females appear to have higher self-esteem than that of the average person in the normalization group. T scores did not differ by more than one or two points during the two administrations.

The use of journals as a method of recording information helped to validate the classroom improvement project because even though some of the methods chosen to measure attitude change did not indicate there was a decrease in negative attitudes and an increase in positive attitudes, the writer's journal indicates the contrary. Positive comments occurred fairly frequently and the students enjoyed working on their projects. They looked forward eagerly to project time

and seemed to enjoy working in groups with their peers.

The writer administered the Writing subsection of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised both pre and post-implementation. During the pretest none of the students even bothered to take the allotted 20 minutes to write their stories. Their written stories were mostly descriptions of a picture prompt and their standard scores (for age) ranged from 60 to 87 with an average of 73. The post-implementation scores ranged from 75 to 104 with an average score of 90. It is possible that this increase was at least in part due to a practice effect, but the writer maintains that there was a qualitative difference in students' writing skills and their efforts to demonstrate those skills pre-implementation and post-implementation.

During one of the publishing periods one of the students displayed a heretofore unknown talent in oral presentation. This particular student was extremely reluctant to write anything down on paper, however his oral presentation helped motivate him to write a page about volcanoes. He also did an excellent job teaching the class about spiders, scorpions, lizards, and alligators and his score on the PIAT-R increased from an 86 to 104. Two of the six students read their written products instead of teaching about them, they were surprised that the other students experienced boredom during their presentation and resolved not to read their papers for their next teaching period.

Discussion

The somewhat conflicting results of the PEI (an increase from 2.0 to 2.5

with 1 being very pleased with school) could be due to a number of factors. The PEI is a random somewhat short sample of how a child feels about school. On any particular day a child may be bored, upset from a disagreement at home, hungry, tired, etc. It is also not apparent whether this difference is significant or not. Some students may not have been completely honest for whatever reason and responded differently than they felt.

Students' grades rose from an average of 78 to 82. This difference may be due to any number of reasons: increased effort or increased motivation due to the student empowerment. This practicum did not have an experimental design so it would not be logical to attribute the increase in GPA to the implementation and it is not clear whether the four point difference is significant or not. It could be due to chance.

Results from the teacher questionnaires did not indicate much of a change in students' behaviors. This is in spite of the fact that visits to the office, to isolation or to time-out decreased a great deal. One of the students that was transferred was sent to the office 12 times but even when his office referrals are disregarded there was a decrease of office referrals from 13 to 2. It may be difficult for teachers to change their perceptions of students even if there are measurable behavioral changes. Teachers may have preconceived notions of students and their behaviors that are difficult if not impossible to alter.

The number of negative statements made by students decreased from an average of 7 a day to 1 or fewer a day. This drastic decrease can be partially

attributed to the relocation of one student to a self-contained BD classroom. The absence of negative comments helped create a more positive atmosphere in the classroom and helped reduce conflict between students. However, even as some students transferred to other schools, more students were moved into the BDR room. The writer attempted to include these students in the practicum but some were not particularly receptive to the idea and so she did not push the issue. Students tended to make positive rather than negative comments regarding their work. One student in particular said, "I love school," on several occasions and his declarations were unprompted.

Students' scores on the Piers-Harris self-esteem measure did not change. In retrospect it seems unlikely that any implementation of 12 to 15 weeks would statistically alter a student's self-esteem at least to the point where it could be measured. Self-esteem is a difficult concept to measure and the use of the Piers-Harris is a measure that should be used in conjunction with other assessment tools in order to obtain an accurate picture of an individual's self-esteem. It took 9 to 11 years for students to form their self-esteem and it is unreasonable to expect that a short program would alter students' self-esteem significantly and if it did it is unlikely that the Piers-Harris is sensitive enough to record the increase. Based on observations made by the writer, the students did appear to feel better about themselves, school, and working with their peers on some occasions but not completely. There did not appear to be any radical difference in how students perceived themselves and/or felt about themselves. Videotaping the students

seemed to make them feel more self-confident.

Recommendations

1. Students should be empowered and allowed to make choices about their academic agendas and projects to demonstrate their accomplishments.

2. Students should be given social skills training to assist them in functioning appropriately in cooperative learning groups.

3. Students should have access to computers especially when they are learning the writing process.

4. The incorporation of videotaping can help teach students valuable skills as well as increase their self-esteem.

5. Teachers should use other methods (in lieu of written evaluations) to help students learn and develop positive attitudes about themselves and school (oral presentations, artwork, dance, kinesthetic movement, etc).

6. The use of study buddies may help increase students' self-esteem and their editing skills.

7. Student empowerment should be investigated with a larger number of students and different student populations.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum will be presented to a group of doctoral candidates during the summer of 1995. The writer utilized the computer lab at her school on several occasions and several people expressed an interest in her project so they asked for and received copies of the practicum report. The writer will

supply copies of the final report to the county special education department and the school as well as to any other persons who express an interest in this report.

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APPENDIX A

PRIMARY EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

Appendix A

Primary Evaluation Instrument

Purpose: To measure pupil attitude toward classroom instruction.

Directions: Here are some questions about how you get along in your class. All of us do better at jobs and games that we enjoy. This form will tell us if you enjoy most of the things done in this class. There are no right or wrong answers. Circle the face that best shows the answer.

1. How do you feel about the things you do in this classroom?

2. How do you feel when the teacher checks your class work?

3. How does the teacher usually look at you?

4. How do you feel when it is time to come to school each day?

5. How do you feel when you look in the mirror?

6. When you want to tell the teacher something important, how does she look at you?

Purpose: To measure pupil attitudes toward peer interaction.

Directions: Everyone knows someone he likes and someone he does not like very much. Some of us have many friends, while others of us have one or two friends. I am interested in learning how each of you feel about all your classmates. Below are some questions and answers. Check or mark the face that best shows the answer for each question. <u>There are no right or wrong answers</u>. The way you see things is what counts.

1. How do most of the other children in this class look when they talk to you?

2. How do you feel about most of the other children in this class?

3. When you are asked to play with a group of classmates, how do they treat you?

4. When you have a story to tell you classmates, how do they look at you?

APPENDIX B

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you think _____ likes school?

Why or why not?

2. Is _____ interested in learning/school/education?

3. What kind of attitude does _____ display toward school?

4. Does _____ have positive comments about school and what she or he does here or are they negative comments? Examples? Circumstances?

5. Does _____ complain about her or his assignments and/or school?

6. Have you ever sent _____ to the office? Under what circumstances? If not, would you have sent him or her if they were not in BD?

7. Does _____ participate in class?

8. Does _____ complete assignments?

9. How are _____'s grades?

10. Does _____ demonstrate any of the following behaviors? And if so, how often? f=frequently e=every once in a while n=never

Defiant _____ Irresponsible_____

Sudden Outbursts _____ Fighting _____

Obscene language or gestures _____